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# Actions a School Should Take When a Current Student Dies



*Here we describe how a school should proceed when a currently enrolled recipient of federal student aid dies.*

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## **WHEN A SCHOOL RECEIVES INFORMATION THAT A STUDENT HAS DIED**

If, during the school year, a school receives information that a current recipient of Title IV aid has died, the school must determine the validity of that information. Until the school has determined whether or not the student remains in attendance, the school may not make additional disbursements of Title IV aid to the student (including releasing any Title IV credit balance that might exist on the student's account from a disbursement made previously).

In order to avoid causing distress to a student's family and friends based on an inaccurate report of a student's death received by the school, the school should first make internal inquiries and consult public information sources. If there is no local newspaper report of a student's death, a school can conduct an online search of the student's hometown newspaper and the newspapers where the death was reported to occur. A school can also search the student's home state vital records office (a list is available at [www.cdc.gov/nchs/w2w.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/w2w.htm)). Internally, a school should get attendance reports from the faculty in whose classes the student is currently enrolled. If the student lives on campus, the school should contact the appropriate residence hall staff to see what information the staff possesses. Faculty members and residence hall staff should be told that if the student is present, it is critical the student call or visit the financial aid office. The school should also write the student at the local residence of record and at any electronic address available (email and social media) to inform the student that it will not be making further disbursements of financial aid to the student until he or she calls or visits the financial aid office.

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### **CPS Match with the U.S. Social Security Administration**

The Social Security numbers of applicants currently in Federal Student Aid's Central Processing System (for all award years currently being processed) are matched weekly against SSA records. If the Social Security number entered in Item 8 of the FAFSA matches that of a deceased person in the SSA records, the CPS will send a new ISIR to all schools indicated on the student's FAFSA. The new ISIR will include Comment Code 076 and the comment text:

*Social Security Administration (SSA) records indicate that the Social Security Number (SSN) that was provided in Item 8 belongs to a deceased person. If the SSN is correct, the applicant must contact the SSA at 1-800-772-1213 or [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov) to resolve this problem. If the SSN is incorrect, the applicant must correct the SSN on a paper SAR or submit a new FAFSA online with the correct SSN.*

If a school receives an ISIR that contains Comment Code 076, it must treat the ISIR as conflicting information.

### Documentation required for discharge of a federal student loan when a student dies

In order to discharge the unpaid balance of a Perkins Loan (including NDSL and Defense loans), FFEL program loan, or Direct Loan, except in exceptional circumstances and on a case-by-case basis, the loan holder or servicer must obtain an original or certified copy of a death certificate or an accurate and complete photocopy of the original or certified copy of the death certificate.

34 CFR 674.61(a)  
34 CFR 682.402(b)  
34 CFR 685.212

#### Enrollment Reporting When a Current Student Has Died

If a school has obtained a copy of the death certificate for a current student, the school must update the student's status in NSLDS. If the school is due to perform its regular Enrollment Status Reporting within the next 14 days, the school may use that process to update the student's status. If the school's regular Enrollment Reporting is more than 14 days in the future, we recommend that the school manually update the student's enrollment status on the NSLDS Professional Access Web site at [www.nsldsfa.gov/nslds\\_FAP/](http://www.nsldsfa.gov/nslds_FAP/) (under the Enrollment reporting tab) to a status of "D."

#### Returning loan funds when a student dies

A school that has to return Direct Loan funds because a student has died should always return them using G5.

A school should complete its internal attempt to resolve the report of the student's death within 30 days. After 30 days, if the school has not resolved the report of the student's death, a school should seek information from the student's family (named on the FAFSA if the student is dependent or married) and any references the student provided during entrance counseling (if the student is a recipient of a federal student loan).

A school that is unable to confirm a student's death must make a determination that the student is no longer in attendance (has withdrawn) 30 days after the end of the earlier of the

- ♦ payment or enrollment period;
- ♦ academic year in which the student was enrolled;
- ♦ educational program in which the student was attending.

A school must return any Title IV funds required under 34 CFR 668.22 as soon as possible but no later than 45 days after date school determined student withdrew.

### Withdrawal date when a student dies

If a school that is not required to take attendance is informed that a student has died, it must determine the withdrawal date for the student under 34 CFR 668.22(c)(1)(iv). This section provides that if the institution determines that a student did not begin its withdrawal process or otherwise provide official notification of his or her intent to withdraw because of illness, accident, grievous personal loss, or other such circumstances beyond the student's control, the withdrawal date is the date that the institution determines is related to that circumstance.

The withdrawal date can be no later than the date of the student's death. For an institution that is required to take attendance, the withdrawal date for a student who has died is the last date of attendance as determined from the school's attendance records. **The school must maintain the documentation it received that the student has died** and determine an appropriate withdrawal date.



### When a student who has outstanding federal student loan obligations dies

The regulations governing Perkins Loans (including Defense and NDSL loans), FFEL program loans, and Direct Loans provide for discharge of a borrower's obligation to repay those loans if the borrower dies (including a Direct Parent PLUS Loan borrower's obligation to repay a Direct PLUS Loan if the student on whose behalf the parent borrowed dies).

If a school has information that a current or former student who has an unretired federal student loan obligation has died, the school must try to obtain an original or certified copy of the borrower's death certificate, or an accurate and complete photocopy of the original or certified copy of the death certificate, and provide the death certificate to the holder of the student's loans.

### *Documentation required for discharge of a federal student loan when a student dies*

In order to discharge the unpaid balance of a Perkins Loan (including NDSL and Defense loans), FFEL program loan, or Direct Loan, except in exceptional circumstances and on a case-by-case basis, the loan holder or servicer must obtain an original or certified copy of a death certificate or an accurate and complete photocopy of the original or certified copy of the death certificate.

### *Obtaining a death certificate or an acceptable copy of a death certificate*

If a school confirms that a current recipient of Title IV aid has died, the school must try to obtain an original or certified copy of the recipient's death certificate, or an accurate and complete photocopy of the original or certified copy of the death certificate. The families of deceased persons have primary responsibility for notifying local and national authorities when a family member dies. (Doctors, other medical professionals, and mortuaries often perform this function, but the responsibility remains with the deceased's family.) Therefore, for dependent students or married independent students, unless the school can determine (for example, from a notice of death or news report) that a medical professional or mortuary was involved, a school seeking to obtain a student's death certificate or an acceptable copy of the death certificate should start with the student's family. Unless the school can determine from a notice of death or news report that a medical professional or mortuary was involved (and from whom the school should first make a request), a school should inquire at local government record offices where the death occurred and offices where the student's permanent residence is located. (Since individual state rules for documenting the death of an individual and obtaining a copy of an individual's death certificate differ widely, a school should consult with its attorney to establish procedures for obtaining the required documentation from local authorities.)

### **Deadline for determination**

A school that is unable to confirm a student's death must make a determination that the student is no longer in attendance (has withdrawn) 30 days after the end of the earlier of the:

- payment or enrollment period;
- academic year in which the student was enrolled;
- educational program in which the student was attending.

A school must return any Title IV funds required under 34 CFR 668.22 as soon as possible but no later than 45 days after date school determined student withdrew.

### *When a student who has died is due a post-withdrawal disbursement*

#### **Clarification**

#### **When a deceased student has earned FWS income**

A school may deliver any FWS income earned by a deceased student to the student's estate.

A school may not make a post-withdrawal disbursement of Title IV funds to the account or estate of a student who has died.

If a school determines that a student has died during a period, it must perform a Return calculation. If the Return calculation indicates that an institution is required to return Title IV funds, the school must return the Title IV funds for which it is responsible.

The student's estate is not required to return any Title IV funds disbursed to the student. Therefore, an institution should neither report a grant overpayment for a deceased student to NSLDS, nor refer a grant overpayment for a deceased student to Debt Resolution Services. If an institution had previously reported a grant overpayment for a student who is deceased to Debt Resolution Services, it should inform Debt Resolution Services that it has received notification that the student is deceased.

The regulations governing the Direct and Federal Perkins Loan programs provide for a discharge of a borrower's obligation to repay a Federal Direct or Federal Perkins Loan if the borrower dies (including a Direct PLUS Loan borrower's obligation to repay a Direct PLUS Loan if the student on whose behalf the parent borrowed dies). If a school is aware that a student who has died has any outstanding Title IV loan debt, the school should contact the student's estate and inform it of the actions it can take to have the student's Title IV loan debt cancelled.

If a Title IV credit balance created from **funds disbursed before the death of the student** exists after the completion of the Return calculation and the institutional refund calculations, the institution must resolve the Title IV credit balance as follows:

1. in accordance with the cash management regulations, paying authorized charges at the institution (including previously paid charges that are now unpaid due to the Return of Title IV funds by the institution);
2. returning any Title IV grant overpayments owed by the student for **previous withdrawals** from the present school (the institution may deposit the funds in its federal funds account and make the appropriate entry in G5);

If the institution has previously referred the grant overpayment to Debt Resolution Services, the institution should provide Debt Resolution Services with documentation that the student has died so that Debt Resolution Services can delete the overpayment from its records.

3. returning any remaining credit balance to the Title IV programs.